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# **‘THEOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY’ AND THE BLINDNESS OF THEORY-BARBARISM IN A PASTORAL HERMENEUTICS: TOWARDS THE ‘INFINISCENCE OF GOD’ IN PROCESSES OF HOPING AND FAITHFUL KNOWING (EPISTEMOLOGY)**

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## **Abstract**

*Theory formation in theology is often directed by the rationalistic principle of simplification. In pastoral caregiving, it leads to the tendency to offer instant answers to the very complex notion of ‘meaning in suffering’. In this regard, the question surfaces whether the philosophical construct of ‘theodicy’, and its attempt to link God in some way or another to human suffering, should be introduced as an appropriate, paradigmatic framework for dealing with processes of caregiving and comforting. It is argued that a causative approach of rationalistic explanation and positivistic clarity (the attempt to give a logical answer and establish a direct connection between the will of God and the phenomenon of undeserved suffering) is insufficient to really comfort people in order to hope and to address the human quest for meaning. The notion of complexity and the philosophical construct of ‘chaosmos’ are critically assessed in order to revisit the interplay between the God-factor and the complexity of human suffering in a pastoral hermeneutics. Instead of hope as the projection of easy solutions for the future (wishful thinking and speculative dreaming), the theological paradox of hoping despite the evidence that the future is bleak (hope against hope) is explored by means of the theopaschitic paradigm of a ‘suffering God’. Instead of the omni-categories of an ‘all-powerful God’ (pantokrator), the pathos-category of an ‘infiniscent God’ is proposed in order to deal with chaosmos and complexity in theory formation for a theology of caregiving in suffering.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key Words:** Practical and Pastoral Theology; Pastoral Hermeneutics; Hope Care; Theopaschitic Theology; Paradox, *Chaosmos* and Complexity in Theory Formation; The Infiniscence of God

In events of severe human suffering, very specifically when people are exposed to different forms of loss due to unexpected, and in many cases undeserved suffering, the question ‘why me?’ surfaces. In the pastoral ministry, for example in hospital chaplaincy, caregivers are often challenged by the theodicy question, namely the attempt to link the will and love

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a research project about the interplay between a spirituality of wholeness and the notion of hope in pastoral caregiving. See Louw 2016.

of God to the notions of evil and the factuality of destruction, loss and suffering. How can a God of love allow the suffering of human beings (providence and the permissive will of God)?

The *Confession of Faith* (*Belgic Confession*, Article 1959) starts with the notion of power as the creation, preservation and government of the universe. God as Father “watches over us with *paternal care*, keeping all creatures so under his power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father...” Although ‘will’ is not mentioned in the Greek text (Matthew 10:29; literally: without our Father), the interpreters read ‘will of the father’ into the text. In the background of the religious mind, God determines everything as a causative factor<sup>2</sup> so that the will of God should at least equal divine power. Divine power is then interpreted in terms of cause and powerful governance (strength) and not in terms of compassion and weakness (vulnerability).

Such an explanatory approach and causative reasoning often becomes a stumbling block for the ministry of hope and comfort in pastoral caregiving, thus, the question whether Christian hope and compassion should be viewed as a solution for the problem of theodicy<sup>3</sup> or rather as a source of comfort in order to deal with paradoxical issues in life.

Without any doubt, theodicy is an existential reality and an essential ingredient of human vulnerability and our exposure to loss and tragedy in life. The whole book of Job can be viewed as an account on our struggle how to come to terms with unexpected loss and undeserved suffering. In Psalm 44:23-26 the sufferer appeals to God: “Wake up, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Get up! Do not reject us forever. Why do you look the other way? Why do you ignore our suffering and oppression? We collapse in the dust, lying face down in the dirt. Rise up! Help us! Ransom us because of your unfailing love.”

The challenge now in a pastoral hermeneutics is how to link the faithfulness of God and promises in the Biblical text to severe forms of human suffering. The question is the following: if a hermeneutical approach intends to link God and compassion to the existential factuality of theodicy, what is the impact on God-images and our conceptualisation of compassion in pastoral caregiving?

To my mind, the first step is the urgent need for a paradigm switch in theory formation for pastoral caregiving, namely a switch from static categories in the conceptualisation of God (categories that portray God in terms of a mechanistic causative principle), to pathos categories (categories that portray God in terms of compassion).

## From ‘Iron Philosophy’ to ‘Theopaschitic Thinking’

My basic assumption and presupposition is that the concept of compassion is unique to the work and life of Christ. It reveals the will of his Father and demonstrates the fact that hope is not an attempt to delude the sickness on to death. Compassion determines God as the

<sup>2</sup> Belgic Confession, Article VIII, 1959: “The Father is the cause, origin, and beginning of all things visible and invisible;”

<sup>3</sup> Theodicy (*theos dike*) means a justification of God in the light of evil and suffering. In essence, it is a human attempt to justify God’s goodness and his handling of affairs; it is largely a philosophical and rational attempt to justify the power and love of God in the light of the reality of evil in this world. It often faces the following dilemma: How to keep God’s hands ‘clean’; i.e. to prove that God cannot be the origin of evil but is still involved in some or other way in the trajectories of life. Theology is then faced with the dilemma how, on the one hand, to safeguard God’s sovereignty (God must be in control; an able God should manage the remote control in order to shift the different canals of life) and on the one hand to prove that God indeed cares. See Louw 2016: 303-313.

suffering God who has revealed his sacrificial love and incarnational presence in the suffering of God the Son (theopaschitic theology of the cross). Theopaschitic hope is a practical demonstration of the fact that hope implies kenotic love. The divine fellow suffering is displayed in events of dereliction, forsakenness and divine despair; it penetrates the core of all forms of dehumanising deaths, loss, anxiety and rejection/isolation. Christian hope penetrates suffering and should not result in *apatheia*.

The *pathos*-approach (theopaschitism) clearly links God with suffering. The cross completes this link, and thus, reveals God as a 'pathetic' being: He is the 'suffering God'. In *Het theopaschitisme*, Feitsma (1956) calls this form of theopaschitism (redefining God's Being in terms of suffering) the most ultimate expression in theology of what is meant by God's compassion.

Christian hope is human-sensitive and connected to passion. It is not connected to a stoic *apatheia* that renders emotions as an obstacle to true knowledge.

God is not an apathetic and stoic God. In this regard, Calvin distanced himself from 'being a stone', i.e. to respond like the Stoics as if one is not affected by anything (Calvin 1949 Book 111, chap. V111:21). His thinking was driven by deep empathy and compassion. "But we have nothing to do with that iron philosophy which our Lord and Master condemned – not only in word, but also in example. For he both grieved and shed tears for his own and other's woes" (Calvin 1949 Book 111, chap. V111:21-22).

Even on his reflection on the omnipotence of God, Calvin is very cautious to portray God's interventions in a causative manner: a mechanistic cause-and-effect approach. Omnipotence is not like "ordering a stream to keep within the channel once prescribed to it, but one which is intent on individual and special movements" (Calvin 1949 Book 1, chap. XV1:174). God is not in a philosophic fashion like a primary agent, the cause of all movement (Calvin 1949 Book 1, chap. XV1:174).

These remarks of Calvin points in the direction of what one can call in theopaschitic terminology: the *passio Dei*, instead of the *impassibilitas Dei* (deistic terminology). In fact, although Calvin wanted to maintain the sovereignty of God,<sup>4</sup> he argues not in static and apathetic categories like the Stoics. He does not want to promote the *impassibilitas Dei* or an iron immutability, but the image of a compassionate Father: "...but what I wish to impress upon my readers in this way is, that the first step in piety is to acknowledge that God is a Father, to defend, govern, and cherish his us, until he brings us to the eternal inheritance of his kingdom..." (Calvin, Book 11, chap. V1:297). With reference to Psalm 115:3, for Calvin it is actually "...insipid to interpret the Psalmist's words in philosophic fashion, to mean that God is the primary agent... This rather is the solace of the faithful, in their adversity, that everything which they endure is by the ordination and command of God, that they are under his hand" (Calvin, Book 1, chap. XV1:174) The Sizoo translation (Dutch) uses 'in' rather than 'under': "...omdat ze in zijn hand zijn" (Calvijn 1931, Boek 1, hoofdstuk XV1, 2,3:192).

Suffering (*paschō*) in the Old Testament is inevitably connected to providence and the theodicy question: Where is God in suffering and how is God related to evil? The OT therefore leaves practically no room for suffering that is fortuitous and happens by accident. However, fate is not behind suffering but the faithfulness of a covenantal promise: I will be

<sup>4</sup> "God is deemed omnipotent, not because he can act though he may cease or be idle, or because by a general instinct, he continues the order of nature previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so overrules all things that nothing happens without his counsel" (Calvin 1949 Book 1, chap. XV1:174).

your God. The connection suffering, guilt and providence have nothing in common with a pessimistic belief as found in Greek tragedy. A mechanical, deterministic and direct causative explanatory model of theodicy does not suffice and fit into the schema of a theopaschitic *passio Dei*.

The question in a pastoral theology is whether one should reason from a cause – effect paradigm or rather from a paradoxical framework of reasoning in order to instil hope as a source of comfort, trust and patience. In this regard, it will be argued that in theory formation for pastoral caregiving, one should shift from the notion of complication and the attempt to come up with explanatory answers, to complexity within the painful awareness that even the Son of God suffered under the unanswered paradoxical question: “My God, my God, why hast you forsaken me?”

If hope is fundamentally shaped by paradox and complexity, what then is the impact of the philosophical construct of *chaosmos* in our understanding and conceptualisation of God in theology, as well as on the praxis of comfort in hope care and the pastoral ministry?

### **The Paradox:<sup>5</sup> ‘Hope against Hope’**

In order to introduce the notion of paradox, the following distinctions should be made:

- *Paradox*: the self-contradictory proposition that appears to be obviously absurd or nonsensical. The contradiction is about apparent, seeming opposite which are maintained at the same time. Like Paul asserts in 2 Cor. 6:9-10: “as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything”.
- *Antinomy*: two contrasting perspectives regarding the same issue/object, each with a legitimate view. Each side is legitimate and equally tenable despite their seeming lack of reconciliation (the legitimacy of two equally tenable opposites). In an antinomy, both sides are substantiated by factual evidence. For this reason, one is compelled to accept both positions as legitimate (Hernandez 2012:3). On the one hand it seems in Scripture as if God is present in suffering. On the other hand, in the forsakenness of Christ, God the Son protests against all forms of human suffering. How can both be true at the same time? But somehow God is against suffering as well as engaged in suffering. Two apparently contradictory ideas represent and convey two spiritual truths.
- *Polarity*: it describes the dynamics and tension in reciprocity created between contrasting opposites. When two contrasting principles are placed side-by-side or invoked simultaneously, tension predictably arises. Two opposites within a dual tension are then maintained and accommodated at the same time as part of the reality at stake. For example, human beings are exposed to sin. However, if they transgress, they will be pardoned due to the mercy and grace of God. Aware of grace, believers still continue to sin, knowing that they are guilty, but at the same will be forgiven when they confess.

Due to the fact that paradox can closely be connected to antinomy and polarity, one should take into consideration that paradox is a many-layered concept.

According to WH Capps (1976), Christian hope is essentially about a paradox: “Hope against Hope”, thus, the plea for a kind of ‘*sola spes*’ in theological theory formation

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the notion of paradox and its role in theory formation for pastoral caregiving, see Louw (2016:129-131).

(Louw 2016:28-29). Hence the perspective that hope, in Christian spirituality and theological propositions, is in essence a paradoxical category.

With paradox is meant the illusion of the opposite/contradiction. "The mind's first step is to distinguish what is true from what is false. However, as soon as thought reflects on itself, what it first discovers is contradiction" (Camus 1965:20). It seems as if the opposites exclude one another. In fact, they complement one another in order to describe complexity and the realm of faith. "To give a basic definition, a paradox is characterized by a self-contradictory proposition that can appear absurd or nonsensical. The absurdity is embedded in the rhetoric" (Hernandez 2012:2).

Søren Kierkegaard (1962:317) connected life and death paradoxically in order to understand the aesthetics or value of life better. "Thus death is the briefest summary of life or life reduced to its briefest form". Within the ambiguity of life and death, 'sunshine' and 'shadow', the beauty of life and hope emerges.

The challenges in life imply more than merely stress and distress. It is the contention of Henri Nouwen that in this life, spiritual tension is irresolvable, irrevocable and inevitable. "Many of the spiritual tensions we encounter are primarily situated within the realms of paradox, antinomy or polarity" (Hernandez about H Nouwen 2012:2).

The essence of our existential struggle namely how to come to terms with life, even the challenge to hope when there is no logical reason to carry on with life and to hope for something new or meaningful change, is about the question how to cope with ambivalence and paradox.

Paradox describes a kind of shocking interruption, a kind of truth that supersedes rational thinking. According to Aristotle (in Cambell and Cilliers 2012:31), the orator should build his/her argument on the *endoxa*, the common beliefs and opinions of the people that served as the premises of the argument. According to Campbell and Cilliers (2012:31), Paul relies on paradox – *para-doxa* – that which is situated beside or outside (*para*) opinion (*doxa*). He introduced the gospel of hope through shocking paradoxes. Paul "subverts the *endoxa*, drawing on conventional language and assumptions only to interrupt them and call them into question" (Campbell and Cilliers 2012:31). In this regard, Paul functioned as a kind of spiritual trickster.

In his book *Trickster Makes this World* (1998) Lewis Hyde pointed out that truth is a kind of boundary question, hence linking the quest for truth to the figure of a trickster; "the fool becomes the one who is *closest* to God" (Campbell and Cilliers 2012:29). Lewis Hyde (1998:12) contends that when Pablo Picasso says, "art is a lie that tells the truth," we are closer to the old trickster spirit. The paradox of the relationship between the 'lie' and the 'truth' in the art of Picasso reveals a trickster spirit of parody.

The trickster is a kind of boundary crosser between the realms of right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead (Lewis Hyde 1998:7). In every case, the trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. However, this confusion is necessary in order to detect the truth. "Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the grey-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. Where someone's sense of honourable behaviour has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox" (Hyde 1998:7).

In their book on *Preaching Fools*, Campbell and Cilliers (2012) combines folly and paradox as the heart of a practical theological approach to the communication of the gospel. Theologising takes place at the brink of liminality. "Liminality lies at the heart of theology"

(2012:39). They refer to the term *limen* (threshold, outlines, and margins) to describe human rituals that mark the passage from one life phase to another (2012:40). Liminality describes the paradoxical spiritual tension of the fullness and emptiness of presence and absence.

One can say liminality describes the religious image of 'pilgrimage'. Human beings are travellers (*homo viator*)<sup>6</sup> and life is *en route*; it describes a journey of hope that is essentially anti-structure and anti-status quo, but ultimately ends up in terms of Christian spirituality with the *communio sanctorum* as a place and space of hope.

Life is never complete. Everyday life is demarcated by the awareness of limitation, vulnerability and paradox. Paradox is actually part of the challenge how to find meaning in life. If hope is really engaged with the existential reality of our struggle and plight for meaning, pastoral theology and a design for a spiritual understanding of hope should reckon with paradox as a structure and ingredient of a hope theory: *fides quaerens spem* (faith seeking different modes and expressions hoping. (Louw 2014:52; 2008:53; 2016:11).

Paradox, contradiction and parody are interconnected categories in the methodology of hermeneutics. One can even toy with the notion, that with reference to the principle of paradox in theology, theology in the Christian tradition plays the role of a trickster. Truth operates within the awareness of contradiction and complexity. Perhaps one can say that paradox is the most apt formulation for the quest for truth in spiritual reflection; complexity is the hardest 'theological nut' to crack when one has to deal with the interplay between human misery and the intervening grace of God.

The advantage of introducing the notion of paradox in a pastoral hermeneutics is the discovery that care is not about trying and solving paradoxes, but the challenge to assist people to persevere despite the paradox; it is about the art how to live the paradox in hope and transfer it into meaningful change. Paradox and complexity should be viewed as spiritual energizers and not as indicators for doubt regarding the presence of God in suffering.

Taleb (2010:13) argues as follows: "I did not grasp much, except that history had some logic and that things develop through contradiction (or opposites) in a way that elevated mankind into higher forms of society."

If complexity and the awareness of paradox are essential ingredients of our existential reality and the dynamics of relationships, what are the implications of the notion of complexity on hope, compassion and the intervention of the God-factor in processes of care and compassion?

### **From Complication (the Attempt to find Instant Answers) to Complexity (the Pain of Hoping Against all Forms of Hope)**

Research in complexity and philosophy points out the importance to differentiate between 'complicated' and 'complex' (Nilson 2007:237-238). Complicated can be defined as something that is difficult to understand, to deal with, or to comprehend despite the fact that a certain level of information is available. The word complex refers to the challenge how to deal with contradictory and paradoxical issues simultaneously while being aware of the fact that issues are not easy to understand or to analyse on a rational level because the system of knowing involves many different but related parts (Louw 2016:161-168).

Nilson proposes the following differentiation:

<sup>6</sup> On the notion of *Homo Viator* as metaphor within a practical theological discourse, see C Vos. In: *Verbum et Ecclesia*; Vol 35, No 2 (2014), 7 pages. doi: 10.4102/ve.v35i2.860.

- (a) In a *complicated situation*: either the situation considered contains an enormous number of interacting elements making calculation extremely hard work, although all the interactions are known. "A complicated process or phenomenon can be decomposed and reduced to solvable parts and it therefore follows that with such an ontological standpoint the positivistic paradigm prevails" (Nilson 2007:238) In the complicated worldview instant answers and quick solutions become the ultimate goal. Knowledge is absolute; true knowledge can be found since valid and reliable facts of cause and effect determine all forms of theory formation (verification). The challenge is then to find optimal solutions.
- (b) In a *complex situation* the interactions between the components are nonlinear. The implication is that bifurcation and choice exist within the situation, leading to the possibility of multiple futures and creative surprises. When dealing with complexity, there are no aspirations to find optimal configurations, only transformative changes into emerging situations and contexts. With this filter, many unknowable phenomena are considered as being related to choices made in daily situations (Nilson 2007:242). Theory in science has then to deal with flux and an infinitive mode of knowing. In the wording of Taleb (2010:9), complication and the idea that we can fix the world is in fact a kind of 'pathology'. "The first leg of the triplet is the pathology of thinking that the world in which we live is more understandable, more explainable, and therefore more predictable than it actually is" (Taleb 2010:9).

In complexity, paradoxes are rendered as intrinsic components of reality. According to Stacey (in Nilson 2007:239), paradox implies an apparent contradiction, a state in which two apparently conflicting elements appear to be operating at the same time. One is then aware of the fact that conflicting ideas cannot necessarily be eliminated or resolved. Complexity thinking thus differs from systems thinking in the sense that components are not organised in a homogenous way, but are embedded in the interplay between order and disorder. "Ontologically, the underlying belief is that of unordered and subjectivity; epistemologically, of heuristics or antipositivism; and teleologically, of a transformative nature" (Nilson 2007:239).

Within the framework of hermeneutical thinking, complexity implies processes of complexification (Rescher 1998:56). Rather than the offering of 'cheap solutions', complexification describes the richness of experiences as embedded in paradox; it does not want to simplify, but to probe into the density of systemic networking (thick descriptions). Complexification is an attempt to understand the system in terms of its complementary parts despite obvious levels of contradiction (Collen 2003:61).

Edgar Morin (2008:21), in his book *On Complexity*, points out that in order to deal with human problems, one has to reckon with the notion of *hyper-complexity*. "But complexity is not only quantities of units and interactions that defy our possible calculation; it also is made up of uncertainty, indetermination, and random phenomena. Complexity is, in a sense, always about chance" (Morin 2008:20).

The articulation of complexity points to a radical new way of thinking in theory formation. Rather than being analytic and reductionist within the split between subject and object, it calculates with the unexpected factor within the happenstances of life. It is more interested in the collective, cooperative and organisational aspects of life. It focuses on integration in order to detect wholeness. It tends to be synthetic and holistic within the dynamics of networking. According to Davies (in Montuori 2008:xxix): "For three centuries, science has been dominated by the Newtonian and thermodynamic paradigms, which present the universe as either a sterile machine, or in a state of degeneration and decay.

Now there is the paradigm of the creative universe, which recognises the progressive, innovative character of physical processes. The new paradigm emphasises the collective, and organisational aspects of nature; its perspective is synthetic and holistic rather than analytic and reductionist.” This new paradigm is not dominated by the capacity for prediction and control, but by creativity and change.

### **A new paradigm in Theory Formation: The Unpredictable Dynamic (Randomness) of ‘Chaosmos’<sup>7</sup> in a ‘Pluri-Verse’**

One can call this new paradigm ‘*the indeterminate or unpredictable dynamics of hope*’, because the focus is away from viewing the cosmos as a gigantic clockwork mechanism, with each component slavishly and unfailing executing its programmed instructions to mathematical precision. The cosmos is not constructed by necessity and reductionist determinism, but rather it is partly a *chaosmos*, constructed by order as well as disorder. It is not prediction or control that determines knowledge. It is not merely the Newtonian notion that the whole universe is reversible and thus not irreversible that dominates. Together with the notion of entropy in thermodynamics, it emphasises the fact of disorder or randomness in a system (Montuori 2008:xxxii). The universe is exposed to processes of decay and thus, the struggle against the forces of corrosion and decay. However, at the same time, there are complex processes of explosive creativity in the cosmos. “From the Clockwork World, where Order was King, to a Decaying World, to a Creative World. The crucial difference in the development of these different understandings of the world lies in the relationship between Order and Disorder” (Montuori 2008:xxxiii). Rather than an either/or method, or even and/and, complexity becomes the *method of generativity, explosive change and creativity* at once. Complexity describes a happenstance wherein order – disorder are about a complex system of interacting relationships and the infinitive tense of being.

The dynamic interplay between *physis*, cosmos and chaos, is called: *chaosmos* – as new paradigm for understanding how disorder can become a creative ingredient within the dynamic activity of order. (Morin 1992:53). In Greek myth, chaos had chronologically been dissociated from the cosmos. An organised universe where law and order reign was projected onto life. However, chaos is according to Morin (1992:54) an “idea antedating distinction, separation and opposition, an idea, therefore, of indistinction, of confusion between destructive power, between order and disorder, between disintegration and organisation, between Hubris and Dike.” Disharmony becomes the harmony in harmony, because *physis*, cosmos chaos can no longer be dissociated. They are always co-presenting to each other. “Conflict is but one semblance among others; no unity of opposites, no dialectic will be able to exhaust the mystery of chaos, that is to say, also, the mystery of the genestic/generic relation of *Chaos* to *Logos* (the discursive development of order and organisation), of *Hubris* (madness) to *Dike* (moderation), of *Elohim* (genesis) to *JHVH* (law)” (Morin 1992:57). Chaos speaks the language of delirium. The universe is at the same time a *pluri-verse* (Morin 1992:64) determined by complexity.

What now is the implication of the paradigm of chaosmos on epistemology and theory formation in general?

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<sup>7</sup> See Louw 2016:162-163.



### **Rationalistic Simplification: The Blindness of Theory-Barbarism**

Chaosmos underlines the dynamics of indeterminism (unpredictability, randomness) and the limitations of a positivistic rationalism, i.e. the attempt to come up with fixed definitions presuming to capture the essence of being and creation. It promotes an approach of infinitive speech and paradoxical thinking. On an epistemological level, complexity and chaosmos-thinking is sensitive to a position of 'not knowing' rather than come up with easy answers and fixed explanatory models.

Within an 'open system', the focus is not on fixed categories like 'omniscience' and 'omnipotence', rather on '*infiniscience*': the unexpected but on-going events of life, as well as the explosion of new integrative complex systems of creative change and hoping.

Behind the notion of complexity is the presupposition that in theory formation even the interdisciplinary approach in epistemology is outdated. At stake is a *trans-disciplinary approach* that reckons with multidimensionality and the indeterminant or unpredictable factor in life and processes of knowing (epistemology). It goes beyond inter-disciplinarily, which involves using the methods of one discipline to inform another, to draw on multiple disciplines while actually challenging the disciplinary organisation of knowledge, and the reductive/disjunctive way of thinking that makes up what Morin was to call the "paradigm of simplicity" (Montuori 2008:xxi).

With trans-disciplinarily in theory formation is meant exactly a kind of philosophical enquiry disputing the paradigmatic background of presuppositions, assumptions and the *idea-matic* background of life. By *idea-matic* is meant: the organisation of knowledge and the construction of concepts in order to contain ways of thinking as related to the realm of creative ideas and the imagination of alternatives or new possibilities that can direct meaningful human behaviour.

Trans-disciplinarily is summed up by Montuori (2008:xxvii) as follows: "A stress on *the construction of knowledge* through the appreciation of the *meta-paradigmatic dimension* – in other words, the underlying assumptions that form the paradigm through which disciplines and perspectives construct knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge generally does not question its paradigmatic assumptions."

According to Montuori (2008:xxii), the contribution of Morin's thinking is the following: "to point out that there are human problems, such as the human/nature or two-culture split, that must be approached with a radically different way of thinking, a way of thinking that, as Morin states, is not disjunctive (either/or), but connects, without the Hegelian assumption that the dialectic will lead to a new synthesis."

### **The Epistemology of Complexity**

The complexity of systems does not anymore align with systems of theorists that maintain the position that human beings are part of a homogenous, stable, theoretically knowable, and therefore, predictable system. In an epistemology of complexity, knowledge is not about a controllable system, but about a *chaosmos* – the interplay between order and disorder (Montuori 2008:xxix). In this indeterminable field of tension, epistemology is an on-going process (infinitive tense) and, with reference to methodology, a kind of trans-disciplinary venture, dealing with the factor of emergence, unpredictability, uncertainty and always referring in theory formation to the importance of the prefix 're' as in re-organisation, re-thinking, re-framing and re-purposing., and so on, suggesting on-going process of creativity and change. Morin's thought is actually a trans-disciplinary mode of hope in time and space; it is "transformative, self-eco-re-organising, by including all of who we are

and indeed stretching our understanding of who we are and pointing us toward new possibilities” (Montuori 2008:xxiv).

The categories faith and hope in this sense literally become a method in itself, namely a ‘way’ or ‘path laid down in walking’. Believing and hoping in epistemology become heuristic principles, open to surprise and the unforeseen. “Unforeseen events can shape our lives in ways we never expected” (Montuori 2008:xxxvi). Contingencies within the happenstances of life then make an appeal on our capacity for wisdom, namely how to respond to the out of ordinary, and ambiguity and paradox as sources of change within a creative process.

Classical science assumed all systems were fundamentally stable and in equilibrium. On the contrary, complexity thinking deals with the fact that equilibrium systems are the exception. The further consequence, for example for *sapientia* thinking (wisdom of the heart), is to deal with the fact that the world is full of ambiguity and uncertainty. The implication is that both faith and hope as dynamic modes of Christian spirituality, are about the art how to live the ambiguity and paradox without definite answers.

Complexity is a warning against rationalistic simplification, because simple thought is incapable of conceiving the conjunction of the one and the many (*unitas multiplex*). It wants to ‘save’ the human mind from the pathology of simplification, idealism and rationalisation. “The modern pathology of mind is in the hyper-simplification that makes us blind to the complexity of the reality. The pathology of ideas takes the form of idealism, where the idea obscures the reality it is supposed to translate, and takes itself alone as real. The pathology of theory is in doctrinarism and dogmatism, which turn the theory in on itself and petrify it. The pathology of reason is rationalization, which encloses reality in a system of ideas that are coherent but partial and unilateral, and do not know that a part of reality is unrationalizable and that rationality’s mission is to dialogue with the unrationalizable” (Morin 2008:6).

To be blind to the problem of complexity; i.e. theoretical blindness, is part of *theory-barbarism*. Due to the notion of *clara et distincta* (clear distinction created by the rationality of the human mind) (Descartes), rationalistic simplification became the paradigm of Western civilisation by disjoining the thinking subject (*ego cogitans*) and the thing being thought of (*res extensa*). Moreover, becoming blind to the problem of complexity. “This blindness is part of our barbarism” (Morin 2008:6). ‘System’ in systems thinking therefore does not refer to what Morin (2008:9) calls ‘*flat systemism*’, namely to reduce the parts to a state of equilibrium. He therefore rather posited an open system that deals with complexity and being aware of the connection (relationship) in the disconnection, and disequilibrium in the energetic flux that constitutes equilibrium within its environment.

Niels Bohr’s introduction of the quantum in microphysics opened up the notion that when new ideas reveal the limits of ideas whose universal value has never been contested, this idea-matic shock should be embraced, because our vision broadens, and we become able to link phenomena that before could seem contradictory. The point is that epistemology is not a strategic point that is occupied to control all knowledge with sovereign power, to reject all adversarial theories, and to give one a monopoly on verification, and, therefore on truth. “Epistemology is not pontifical not judiciary. It is the place of both uncertainty and dialogics” (Morin 2008:28). Epistemology always point to processes of transcending and probing into the beyond of life.

Complexity is pointing to a ‘going beyond’ (Morin 2008:11). Moreover, this is the basic function of hope in a philosophical approach to methodology in theory formation – the surpassing of the closed system into a meta-system of ‘openness’ and ‘wholeness’. Hope

probes into the spiritual realm of wholeness, i.e. the integration of all frameworks of meaning and purposeful orientation towards future planning, goal setting and anticipatory decision-making.

### **The Whole is not All: Beyond Holism**

Wholeness is often confused with 'holism' (Louw 2016:166-167). Different parts in a system compile the whole. In holism, this 'whole' is analysed according to its constituent elements. This act entails a loss of information about the organism because the whole in complexity entails more than the analysis of its parts. The whole in wholism is not holistic in the sense of a sum total that includes the parts and compiles a closed and homogenous circle of interaction. A holistic explanation thus seeks to simplify the problem of the complex unity.

The following remark by Morin (2008:101) aptly sums up the problem of holism as an all-inclusive, unifying concept: "Systems theory reacted to reductionism with its idea of the whole, but believing it has surpassed reductionism, its 'holism' merely brought about a reduction to the whole, from which arose not only its blindness to the parts as parts but to its myopia with the respect to organization as organization, and its ignorance of the complexity at the heart of any global unity." The point is: the dynamism of the whole does not necessarily explain the parts or lead to an annihilation of the parts; nor does the parts explain the whole in an intelligible way. Part and whole is not reducible to the other, but in their interrelatedness and interaction, new dimensions of meaning are created without losing the identity of the parts or the meaning of particularity.

'Whole' is a qualitative concept that always surpasses rational quantification and calculation, because in its complexity the unexpected and the paradox suddenly surface and destroy a fixed schematised version of meaning. The whole is not all, thus the necessity to deal in wholeness with the fact that the complex face of the whole always moves beyond the purely globalising and enveloping idea of the whole. "Thus all systems comprise an immersed, hidden, and obscure zone, teeming with stifled potentialities. The duality between the immersed and the emergent, the potential and the actual, the repressed and the expressed, is the source, in the great living and social poly-systems, of scissions and dissociations between the spheres of the parts and that of the whole" (Morin 2008:102).

In this regard, we can conclude that 'hope-against-hope' is such a hidden emerging factor that always introduces the surprise of new potential forms of meaning on an *idea*-matic level. It is at this point that the Christian faith reveals the bottomless pit hitherto concealed in the notions of identity and hope. In this profound scission between the parts and the whole, between the world of the internal and that of the external, the notion of a complex whole, opens up the vista of transcendence and unexpected happenstances.

The totality of hope and the anticipation of something new and different, deal with the fact that there are black holes in every illuminating whole. The brightness of the whole is not the euphoria of a perfect system, the hermeneutics of complexity always operates within blind spots, zones of shadow, and ruptures. "The true totality is always fissured and incomplete" (Morin 2008:103); the whole is uncertain and ambiguous, a poly-totality. The moment one pretends to capture the whole in one paradigm, wholeness becomes a phantom-concept; "the concept of system is no magic formula or some vehicle that might transport us to the state of knowledge. It offers us no security. It must be straddled, corrected, and guided. It is a pilot-concept, but only on condition that it is piloted" (Morin 2008:107).

Such is hope; hope as a beacon in the *chaosmos* of a complex whole. Hope reminds us of the fact that the whole is not all; it thus becomes a pilot-concept for *homo viator* in its journey to find meaning and significance. As an existential concept, hope is in itself not exclusive; hope opens up the human mind for a poly-totality of different levels of praxis thinking – even for the spiritual praxis of divine intervention.

In the light of the previous outline on complexity as a relatively new paradigm in theory formation, where does it leave us with the notion of God? What is the implication of the chaosmos theory on theological reflection about the character of God's presence in such a universe determined by paradox?

### The God-question: From Omniscience to Infiniscience<sup>8</sup>

Theology is often introduced as the ability 'to solve the puzzle'; within Christian spirituality, the pieces are in place. Orthodox faith cannot function in a complex filter where there is no order, no control, and no apparent solutions present at all. God is often portrayed as a 'God of order'.

Within the cosmos, God is professed as the causative and logic principle of a created well-organised, divine constellation reflecting the logic of the providence of God. There was no space for chaosmos within the notion of the God of cosmos. To maintain his divine control concepts like omnipotence and omniscience are introduced in doctrine to project an all-powerful deity (*pantokrator*).

A text like 1 Corinthians 14:33 is mostly interpreted in simplistic and homogenous categories: "For He is not a God of confusion and disorder but of peace and order." (Amplified Bible). Referring to functional issues like prophesising and speaking in a strange language within the context of the liturgical practice of the early church, *akatastasia* (disorder) as the opposite of *eirēnē* (peace) lead to an ontological interpretation of a cosmic and divine principle of logic cause. The text rather refers to *šālôm* as a category of spiritual healing (new state of mind and being) emanating from the fact that Christ is the mediator of peace. The 'order' of peace reflects the mind of Christ, not an ontology of fixed and harmonious (homogenous) cosmic forces. Liturgy and preaching should therefore establish this messianic peace rather than to be used to indicate ecclesial and official categories of power and control. "In other words, the biblical concept of peace (from *šālôm*) is primarily that of wholeness" (Beck and Brown 1976:780).

How then should the paradigm of complexity be translated into a theological paradigm that incorporates *chaosmos*, disorder, contradiction and paradox?

If traditional conceptions regarding the 'power of God' are deconstructed by Paul in terms of the complexity of weakness, what then is the implication of the complexity theory for what one can call the 'praxis of God'?

In slightly a different way these questions have been posed by Boulten and Allen (2007:262) as they refer to the fact that Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion* (2006), challenges theological theory formation to explore whether the complexity theory sheds any light on ideas regarding images of God. "So if it were the case that there are no fundamental laws fixed either by God or mathematics, or by God through mathematics, where does that leave God?" (Boulten and Allen 2007:268).

How is God related to what one can call the *chaosmos* of suffering and the 'non-sense' within meaning? Is perhaps 'God' more complex than the logic of doctrine and confession

<sup>8</sup> See Louw 2016:163-169.

should admit, because 'weakness; is difficult to merge with omnipotence and disorder with providence?

Within the culture of the near east different metaphors for God surface in the Old Testament. Within a violent cultural context of war, the image of God as 'militant warrior' or 'defending soldier' is quite evident. Within that setting, it makes sense while in a more agricultural and stable context of land, the pastoral image of 'shepherd' seemed to be more appropriate. Metaphors therefore change and are not fixed prescriptive entities. The complexity-theory challenges therefore pastoral theology to revisit existing metaphors for God and to think more in terms of dynamic to-be- categories than fixed substantial categories.

Applied to the realm of theory formation in theology, the implication of the complexification theory will be to move from a fixed dogmatic approach to a more flexible dynamics of hermeneutics within different cultural contexts; i.e. the dynamics of 'precensing'; a position of 'not knowing'<sup>9</sup> and being open for the mystery and surprise of God's intervention from the 'eschaton' into the vulnerability of the existential here and now of daily events.

The point is that the concept 'God' in the Old Testament refers to the infinitive of a verb. In the case of the noun *Jahvē*, derived from the verb *hjh* (Hebrew) indicates a vivid promise that *Jahvē* will always be there where humans are. God is an Exodus-God not a Cathedral-God. The presence of God in this regard attains the mode of an infinitive, namely an on-going divine endeavour; an indication of a sustainable faithfulness under all conditions.

Old Testament Studies assert that the Jewish and Christian God is more verb- than noun-like. "Several biblical scholars translate God's answer to Moses' request for God's name in Exodus 3; 14, YHWH, as 'I am who I am becoming' rather than the etymology of YHWH, I am who I am." (Miller-McLemore 2012:8). The point is, in either case, YHWH is a 'verbal form'<sup>10</sup> and indicates the sustainable presence of an on-going intervention and promise of God's faithful and covenantal being-with, rather than a metaphysical entity interpreted in terms of immutable categories.

The name *Jahvē* does not describe a fixed theological principle or definition of a substance or static noun, it rather points to what one can call *infinisciences of divine engagements* (on-going modes of divine interventions through and by the indwelling Spirit of God within the functions of the church as expressions of God's presence in this world). *Infiniscience* is in essence a *pneumatological* concept.

Infiniscience also expresses the *promissio*-character of the *hesed* of God to Moses in the Exodus 3:1-22 narrative. Compassion is linked to the Hebrew meaning of the name of God as expressed in the continuous tense of the verb to be: *haja*. The name of God has thus future, hopeful implications for the quality of life emanating from the vivid presence of the Lord (YHWH): 'I am that I am', or 'I will be who I will be'. In this name, his *El Shaddai*, his all-empowering presence, will be displayed as a co-suffering source of encouragement and hope. The suggestion of the future tense in the promise to Moses yields processes of hoping, namely that the significance of the name of God will always be revealed in his

<sup>9</sup> "Die genannten Argumente zeugen von einer innerweltlichen Zukunft, die sich jedem Planen und Vorausblick des Menschen entzieht in die Offenheit und in die Dunkelheit des Nichtwissens hinein" (Kempfen 2015:220-221). See also p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> In English, "gerunds are words that end with *-ing* and look like verbs but function as nouns. That is, they are nouns (words that name persons, places, ideas, etc.) that contain action; they are verbs used as nouns" (Miller-McLemore 2012:8).

faithfulness to his promises and gradually (infinitive tense), through his unfolding actions of comfort and care (the praxis of God), faithful people will discover that even in the complexity of unpredicted events, God does not necessarily explain what is happening, but that he displays his mercy (*hesed*) despite the paradoxes that often leads to the outcry of human beings in anguish and despair.

But, does the notion of a compassionate God saves us from hopelessness and the tendency to give up hope if the future seems to be bleak and life becomes futile?

### **Dare to Hope Within the Complexity of Processes of Transformation?**

Within the framework of the social and political realities of daily life, specifically in the post-apartheid context of South Africa, the burning question about hope as an option in processes of political transformation is posed by Pumia Gobodo-Madikizela in her new publication *Dare we Hope? -Facing Our Past to Find a New Future* (2014). It seems as if the moral fibre of our society is fading away. Corruption and violence point to non-hope and social despair.

In an interview with *La Vita* (2014:13), Gobodo-Madikizela shared her uncertainties about the sustainability of a politics of hope. Since 2007, with the beginning of the so-called Polokwane-era (a period of political self-justification, the silencing of fraud, and even ignorance on many levels of government) it seems as if hope, and the human projection of a more humane society, is becoming more and more exposed to 'disillusionment and distrust'. It seems as if the verdict of Ernst Bloch<sup>11</sup> is indeed true, namely that human hope can never move beyond the utopian not-yet character of the dreaming human spirit – the utopia of wishful thinking and need-fulfilment.

However, the factuality of disillusionment should not rob human beings of the opportunity to dare hoping. Despite the alarming political realities in South Africa, a proper spirituality of hope is for Gobodo-Madikizela like the flashing of lightning; it is kindled by moments of human encounters and gestures of remorse, forgiveness and reconciliation. In this regard, the confession of Eugene de Kock (a former South African police colonel and assassin, active under the apartheid government, nicknamed 'Prime Evil' by the press) before *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission* is for Gobodo-Madikizela (2014) a gesture of hope. The existential realism of hope resides often in the "power of the moment" (Gobodo-Madikizela in *La Vita* 2014:13).

In his philosophy of hope, Ernst Bloch refers to this power, imminent within in every moment, as the humane principle of *anagnorisis* (acknowledgement and embracement)<sup>12</sup>. The *anagnorisis* of humane encounters are for him an indication of beacons of existential

<sup>11</sup> The not-yet differs from annihilation philosophy in the sense that the 'not' of not-having is constructive: it is focused on anticipation, on 'healing', on human 'wholeness' not annihilation as in the case of nothingness (Nichts = the labyrinth of 'sin', the evil of human oppression and capitalism) (Bloch 1961:48-41). In the case of Bloch's *docta spes* ("Was-Sinn") – the outstanding 'what' of life, points to the utopia of human dignity – the intentional meaning of life.

<sup>12</sup> *Anagnorisis* differs from psychoanalysis and the notion of self-maintenance. In this respect, Bloch criticizes Freud and Jung (1962:351). Freud with the notion of libido encapsulates the self in terms of the prison of the past. Dreams and expectations stems from suppressions of the past. Instead of progression and hope, a human being becomes a captive of processes of resignation and regression. The libido can produce nothing new. Freud and Jung promote regression rather than progression. Instead of libido, Bloch poses the notion of an utopian hunger (Bloch 1959:71), or urge, or longing for future identity (*Heimat*). Instead of psychoanalysis, *anagnorisis* (the encounter between Joseph and his brothers as the utopian spirit of a *we-identity* of human embracement) anticipates a *sum bonum* or ultimate reality (*Ultimum*) (Bloch 1968:271). The ultimate of life is captured by the notion of nurture and compassionate care -*die Sorge* (Bloch 1968:249).

hoping – the twilight of the lived moment (*Dunkel des gelebten Augenblicks*). In the twinkle of the human eye, when perpetrator and victim face one another, and a human being starts to confess: “Sorry, forgive me, I did the wrong”, hope is created anew (Gobodo-Madikizela 2014).

Dare to hope? When any logical reason for hope has been cancelled out, and the facts of life press one into a state of non-hope, it is exactly at this ‘dead-line’ that the Christian notion of hope sets in. “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed” (Romans 4:18). The gynecological factuality in terms of a medical assessment reads as follow: “...he (Abraham) faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead” (Romans 4:19). Yet Abraham did not waver in non-hope, but interpenetrated the complexity of human doubt and anguish with the promise of God, namely that he will be the father of many – this is the paradoxical logic of the promises of an *infiniscent God*.

### **The Feature of a Christian Spirituality of Hope**

A Christian spirituality of hope is not based on speculation or calculation, but on trust and confidence; on seeing the unseen (Louw:498-504).

In a nutshell: Christian hope, as the beautification of life, functions as an anchor for the soul, it stabilises life and should establish steadfastness and trust. Hebrew 6:19 summons depleted people to hold onto hope, even if they are in fact victims of poverty and severe tribulation: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure”.

- From a *psychological point of view*, hope is a dream for a better life and a wish for positive need fulfilment – a pursuit of happiness. In terms of positive psychology, it represents the principle of inner strength and the personal capacity for growth.
- From a *sociological point of view*, hope is about the transformation of structures in order to establish safety, a humane life and just society – the establishment of human dignity.
- From an *existential point of view*, hope is a choice, a challenge to meaning-giving in the light of constructive values – moral decision-making.
- From a *philosophical point of view*, hope is about the epistemology and paradigm of wisdom (*sophia*) – the search for truth within the bipolar tension between good and evil in order to discern what really counts in life. In an ontology of the not-yet, the principle of hope refers to the utopia and dream for a ‘humane’ and ‘good’ life (freedom from all forms of oppression and stigmatisation/discrimination).
- From an *economical and environmental point of view*, hope is about a sustainable livelihood, care for the land, and the preservation and conservation of the planet (eco-perspective), free from exploitation and selfish human greed; it encompasses planning, design, projection and forecast – prognostics.
- From a *spiritual point of view*, hope is the envisioning and imaging of purposefulness, a sense of meaning within an acute awareness of paradox and immense suffering. Within the framework of theodicy, it poses the meaning question: where to?
- From a *Christian point of view*, hope is a new state of mind and being (soulfulness) in the light of the future as *adventus* – being as affirmed by the faithfulness of God and resurrection of Christ; an embodiment of kenotic love despite the nothingness and annihilation of death; a display of the fruit/*charisma* of the Spirit and a vivid expectation of the coming of Christ (*paroesia*).

## Conclusion

In order to conclude one can say that *the name of God refers more to a verb in the continuous tense than a fixed substance in the past tense, thus, the following theological paradigm shift: from the omniscience of God to the infiniscience of God. The infiniscience of God indicates that his power is less about a causative threat-power and more about a compassionate comfort-empowerment; infiniscience displays sustainable and on-going faithfulness and grace. God is the living God within the covenantal infiniscience: the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.* The fact is that the *hesed* and *oiktirmos* of God have implications for both the naming of God in the praxis of caregiving, as well as for a Christian anthropology. *Hesed* and *oiktirmos* define God as a Compassionate Companion and Intimate Partner for spiritual wholeness in life; they define human beings as agents and beacons of hope and wounded healers of life despite the sig sag patterns of suffering.

The whole framework of the messianic expectation and hope in the New Testament is determined by passion. In the account on Christ's narrative of suffering, *paschō* demarcates the identity of Christ's mediatorial work and the connection with death: *pathēma tou thanatou* (Heb. 2:9). *Paschō* is closely connected to soteriology. It is substitutionary in character because Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 13:12). The suffering of Christ as displayed in a theology of the cross, describes the all-sufficiency and completeness of his atoning sacrifice. His vicarious suffering took place *ephapax*, once for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; Rom. 6:10). Christ's vicarious suffering means for believers not deliverance *from* earthly suffering, but deliverance *for* earthly suffering and the creation of mode of courageous resilience.

The hope emanating from a theology of the cross (the divine paradox of the forsakenness of the dying Son of God) resides in the fact that due to his vicarious suffering, Christ is able to comfort through his compassion; suffering defines Christ as a high priest who sympathises (*sympathēsai*) with our weakness (Heb.4:15). Suffering furthermore, constitutes the church as a *koinōnia*, a fellowship partaking in the sufferings of Christ (*sympaschomen*). Believers are summoned to show not merely sympathy with one another but active and practical compassion (*sympaschō*). Despite paradoxes, suffering becomes a kind of ministry (*diakoneō*) (2 Cor. 11:23 ff.) and serves to identify the true servants of the church. *Paschō* then is intrinsically an eschatological category and is a means to *doxa* and glorification. Repeatedly in the New Testament suffering and glory (Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 5:1, 10), as well as suffering and patience (2 Thess. 1:4; Heb.10:32) demarcate the journey of hope throughout the trajectories of life.

In general, the word *splanchnizomai* is reserved for the care and pity of Christ as a display of the compassion of God the Father. Furthermore, pastoral care derives its unique theory and identity from *ta splanchna*, the compassion of God. Due to *ta splanchna*, God should be introduced to suffering human beings as a *Compassionate Companion*. The implication is that we ourselves, within the unique meaning of the human soul (*nēfesh*), should be compassionate, "and it is to understand that undergoing the dispossession of self, entailed by compassion, is to align our own 'being' with God's 'being', and thus, performatively, to participate in the ecstatic ground of the Holy Trinity itself" (Davies 2001:252).

Instead of the impassibility of God and our human tendency of *apatheia*, compassion summons us to a lifestyle of compassionate and hospitable being-with and suffering-with. The further advantage of the emphasis on *ta splanchna* is that compassion is part of the vocabulary of the church in its *koinōnia*. Compassion, *koinōnia* and the gifts or fruits of the Spirit create a pneumatic praxis of hope and diaconic outreach. In *splanchna* natural human affection and empathy is refigured and transformed by kenotic love and divine self-giving;



it becomes the foundation of the new life and hope that is the spirit of the church. Compassion in this sense represents the transformation of humanity by the supremely compassionate act of God in the incarnation (Christology) and inhabitation (pneumatology). "God is *polusplanchnos*, and by becoming compassion in the flesh, God has summoned his people likewise to become compassion within the community of the church, whose mutuality re-enacts, through participation, the original mutuality of Father, Son and Spirit" (Davies 2001:249).

Hall (1993:133) asserts that one of the most repressing God-images of Christian theism and cultural Christian imperialism was 'The Father Almighty' – an image which was misused in the North American continent to insulate people from the reality of their situation. Such a theology, he argues, constitutes part of the repressive mechanisms of a class that can still camouflage the truth because it is well padded economically and physically; and that this theology, accordingly, is partly responsible for the oppression of others who suffer from First World luxury, aggressiveness, and self-deceit (Hall 1993:133). Hall (1993:134) calls such a theology that maintains the image of deity, based on a power principle that can only comfort the comfortable, 'a flagrantly disobedient theology'. Indeed, God comforts the afflicted, but also afflicts the comfortable.

On the other hand, many Christians are accustomed to a traditional understanding of God that widens the gap, rather than narrowing the schism between faith and technology. Many are caught up by a "fear of God" that alienates them from God instead of drawing God and life together. Much of Christian spirituality is about punishment and condemnation, rather than transformation, celebration and the embrace of life. Fear of God's power is more predominant than closeness and adoration.

"God's love for me was limited by my fear of God's power, and it seemed wise to keep a careful distance even though the desire for closeness was immense. I know that I share this experience with countless others. I have seen how the fear of becoming subject to God's revenge and punishment has paralyzed the mental and emotional lives of many people independently of their age, religion, or life-style. This paralyzing fear of God is one of the great human tragedies" (Nouwen 1979:121).

Within an 'open system' and the painful awareness of complexity and paradox, the focus is not on 'omniscience' and 'omnipotence' (the Ceasar notion of an all-powerful imperium – *omni*-category) and the eventual spin off of fear. The focus is rather on sustainable processes of hoping and the link with a To-Be-God, an *Infiniscient God*. Infiniscience points to the on-going intervention of *Jahvê* and the steadfast faithful presence of a covenantal God in all spheres of life. The concept 'God' (Yahweh) as an active verb (to be) is a kind of unexpected, merciful happenstance within the on-going events of life. Within the explosion of new integrative complex systems of creative change and hoping, the presence of God surfaces as the amazing discovery and promise in the Old Testament: 'I will be your God'; 'I am who I am, and I shall be there wherever you are'.

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